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# THE TRAINING OF CITY PLANNERS

by Howard K. Menhinick

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# THE TRAINING OF CITY PLANNERS

Howard K. Menhinick[1]

As a basis for my presentation of the training of city planners in the Graduate City Planning Program at Georgia Institute of Technology and for your evaluation of the program, I should like to comment on what seem to me to be significant developments and trends in city planning in the United States.

## Current Trends Affecting City Planning Instruction

Cities are aware, as never before, of the need for planning their future growth and development. Suburban migration, with all the problems of providing customary governmental services to a dispersed and scattered population, downtown traffic congestion and lack of adequate parking spaces, public transit systems whose services are declining at a time when they should be increasing, slum areas that are developing more rapidly than they can possibly be cleared and redeveloped, antiquated zoning ordinances that have long since ceased to be useful tools for guiding the utilization of urban land -- all of these are tangible evidences that the business of building and running a city, like any other business, cannot be accomplished satisfactorily without adequate long-range planning. If these evidences were not enough, the increasing costs of public services and the inadequate yields of the sources of tax revenue available to cities are compelling arguments for the most efficient possible development and operation of these cities.

The result of the rapidly increasing utilization of planning as an aid in the solution of the pressing problems that are facing cities is an acute shortage of well-trained city planners. This shortage appears likely to continue for some years because too few first-rate men are being trained for the profession. This is largely a result of the fact that not many college students know about the challenging needs and opportunities afforded by the comparatively new and rapidly developing profession of city planning. Today, much city planning is being done by well meaning but incompetent persons. There is not the needed competition for jobs that would weed out those who are not qualified. Cities suffer and the prestige of city planning as an important function of government is lowered. Consequently, if Georgia Institute of Technology can train even a limited number of competent city planners it will be performing a much needed service.

Not only are increasing numbers of cities recognizing the need for city planning but the very nature of planning is changing. Not long ago, city planning was conceived of as primarily an engineering blueprint -- a Master Plan which incorporated a planner's superior knowledge of how streets and parks and railroads and other physical facilities should be located and designed, all in proper relation to each other. There was a long period when planning was considered a one-shot enterprise with the Master Plan blueprint as its end objective. Although a significant number of isolated accomplishments may be

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credited to the best of these plans, most of them have wound up on library shelves rather than as accomplishments in brick and steel.

The Master Plan is certainly a key tool in the planning process but it is only one of a number of important tools and it is most certainly not the end product of planning. Its usefulness is limited by the fact that many different public agencies and thousands upon thousands of individuals daily make city planning and developmental decisions. If these many daily decisions are to be influenced, guided, and brought into harmony to produce a well planned and well developed city, planning must proceed not as a once-a-decade effort but as a daily operation. The correct objective, in my opinion, is not a "planned city" but a "planning city". This objective requires a different kind of training than was needed to produce a Master Plan blueprinter.

In this connection, it is significant that in a steadily increasing number of cities planning is becoming an accepted function of government. These cities are establishing adequately staffed departments of city planning, coordinate with other city departments and with a planning director reporting directly to the city's chief administrative officer -- city manager or mayor. Specialists as well as directors are needed for these staffs. We hope that the training at Georgia Institute of Technology is such that its graduates may early make worthwhile city planning contributions in the fields in which they have had their undergraduate training but that they may also be broadly enough trained so that they may eventually perform the planning coordinating function which is the unique contribution of the city planning profession.

There is now general recognition that many of the problems of city development are so complex that they cannot be solved, except superficially, by the efforts of any one man or, indeed, any one profession. A team is usually required. Today we hear less argument than in the past as to whether planning is the appropriate province of the architect, the landscape architect, or the civil engineer. All three professions and many others have important roles. Most people are now convinced that the involved problems of urban development require the participation and collaboration of many different professions and disciplines -- civil engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, sociology, economics, psychology, geography, public administration, and the like. At the same time, city planning, as a discipline, has principles and techniques which are its particular contribution. There is an opportunity, therefore, and a need for planners who are primarily planning specialists in one of the long-established professions or disciplines. There is also a need for planners who are generalists and who are capable of performing the essential coordinating functions. Both generalists and specialists require a broad understanding of the problems of urban development -- the one, to fit his specialty properly into the total picture; the other, to perform competently the coordinating function. The generalists require, in addition, executive and leadership ability to enable them to serve as directors of planning undertakings.

In the light of these developments in the profession of planning, Georgia Institute of Technology admits, as candidates for its degree, persons who have a Bachelor's degree in one of the above mentioned disciplines or in the humanities, and who were in the upper half of their classes. Men with training in these varied fields can make unique contributions to city planning. In working together as a team in the solution of city planning problems, a group of students with diverse backgrounds gains valuable first-hand knowledge of the techniques and of the possible contributions of the various professions. They early develop a habit of interdisciplinary collaboration which will be of value to them throughout their subsequent professional careers. Georgia Institute of

Technology hopes to have always a number of students from other countries, particularly those countries that are advanced in planning. These men are able to contribute to our American students a knowledge of the planning policies and techniques that are in use in their countries and, in turn, gain an understanding of the planning experience of the cities in the United States.

If a student comes to the City Planning Program from one of the non-design professions, he is required to take, without credit, work in graphic presentation and design as preparation for city planning field and drafting room problems. Men whose background is deficient in the social sciences will be required to undertake directed reading in these fields in order to develop essential background for their work in planning.

There is another trend which is influencing the direction of planning instruction at Georgia Institute of Technology. The South, which this institution serves, is becoming industrialized and urbanized at a very rapid rate. The small- to medium-sized cities of the South, whose growth has been long delayed because of the predominance of an agriculture economy, are now growing much more rapidly than most cities of similar size in the United States as a whole. This means that cities of the South now have an opportunity that will never be theirs again to avoid many of the serious mistakes of urban development that characterize most of the cities in the more highly urbanized sections of our country. Furthermore, Georgia Institute of Technology has at its very doorstep in the Atlanta metropolitan region and its environs an unexcelled urban planning laboratory. For these reasons, the emphasis in the planning program at Georgia Institute of Technology is on urban planning rather than rural planning or large-scale state, regional or national planning. These latter subjects are not entirely neglected, however, because they have important effects upon urban development.

## Time Requirement for Masters' Degree

Most students require two years to obtain the degree of Master of City Planning at Georgia Institute of Technology. The intervening summer is devoted to an internship in the office of an approved planning agency or planning consultant, working on a jointly approved project.

## The Content of the Planning Curriculum

The core of the Graduate City Planning Program at Georgia Institute of Technology is a series of interrelated seminars and drafting room and field problems covering the major aspects of urban community development -- streets, transit, railroads, ports, airports, and utilities; schools and other public buildings; parks, playgrounds and other public open spaces; and residential, business, and industrial districts -- all properly interrelated. Included also are the various devices for plan effectuation such as zoning ordinances, land subdivision regulations, mapped street acts, and capital expenditure budgets.

Most of the planning problems are laid in the urban communities of the region. Occasionally the school undertakes, as a student problem, a planning study for a near-by small community. Such a study was carried out last year for Cleveland, Georgia, a city with a population of less than 1000 persons. Such studies have obvious difficulties and limitations but they provide a stimulating sense of reality which cannot otherwise be obtained.

Seminars which provide a basis for the field problems include instruction

in urban sanitary facilities and urban transportation systems such as highways, railways, waterways, ports, and airports, given especially for the graduate city planning students by the civil engineering department. The objective is to give enough instruction so that the non-civil-engineering student will understand the important aspects of these subjects but not enough instruction so that he will think he is qualified to do the detailed planning of them.

Seminar instruction also accompanies problems in the preparation of land-use surveys and land-use plans and urban redevelopment projects. The social sciences make important contributions to these problems. For example, simultaneous with a field problem in urban redevelopment, the students participate in a seminar entitled "Sociological and Psychological Techniques for City Planning" which deals, in part, with the solution of the human problems encountered in an urban redevelopment project. It is obvious that unless the human, including the political, problems can be satisfactorily resolved, the planner will have no opportunity to solve the physical problems. In this same course, the students attend, observe, and criticize group conferences seeking to resolve issues, controversial meetings of Boards of Zoning Appeal, and the like. This particular instruction is given on the theory that basic policy decisions in planning, as opposed to technical decisions, should be made by the citizens of a community through the various democratic processes that are available to them. It is therefore important that the planner learn how to conduct hearings and conferences in a manner that will effectively elicit the viewpoints of the participants as an important step in the process of democratic planning decision making.

Because city planning is basically a governmental function, students come to grips in a governmental seminar with the place of planning not only in the nominal structure and functioning of local government but also in the less readily discernible community power structure. In still another seminar, students gain an insight into the nature of the economic resources of communities, techniques for at least roughly measuring these resources so that plans prepared for a community may bear a proper relation to the community's ability to pay, and an understanding of the effects of various kinds of planning decisions upon a community's economic base.

In their daily work, planners are required to write clear, convincing reports and to explain and defend their recommendations at public meetings. There is therefore a required course in speaking and writing on planning subjects. To complete this course, students are required to give a public talk and prepare a manuscript suitable for publication on some aspect of planning. Statistics is another tool with which they are required to gain reasonable competence.

The curriculum aims to provide enough training in the tools and special techniques of the profession so that graduates will be able to take their places as immediately useful members of the staffs of planning agencies and planning consultants. At the same time, the program aims to give the students a broad understanding of cities, their functioning, their planning limitations and their planning opportunities so that in the ensuing years of the students' professional careers they may rise to positions of planning leadership where they can make important contributions to the improvement of the urban environment in which increasing numbers of the people of the world are destined to live and work and play.

## Cooperative Program of City Planning Instruction, Research, and Service in the South

A significant current development is a cooperative program of city planning instruction, research, and service in the South being jointly participated in by Georgia Institute of Technology, the Universities of North Carolina and Oklahoma, and the Southern Regional Education Board. Other interested institutions and agencies of the fourteen southern states joined with these three institutions and the Board in a Southern Regional Congress on City Planning held last summer at Roanoke, Virginia. The participants in the Congress identified the principal city planning problems of the South and jointly recommended programs of instruction, research, and service that will contribute to the solution of these problems. The recommendations are now in process of being implemented.

Additional universities which propose to develop strong programs in the field of city planning will be invited to become members of the cooperative program. States that decide to concentrate their university resources on programs in other fields for which they consider themselves especially well equipped have the privilege of sending their residents who wish to study city planning to one of the cooperating institutions that has elected to develop strength in the field of city planning.

The South is rapidly becoming urbanized. It is the hope of Georgia Institute of Technology that its graduate city planning students may make worthwhile contributions to the planning of better cities in the South and elsewhere.

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